

Message Text

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DEPT PASS US MISSION, USUN NEW YORK

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PORG PDEV CU RQ UNGA
SUBJ: DEMARCHE TO CUBANS ON PUERTO RICO

REF: STATE 188943

1. I PRESENTED COPY OF PRESIDENT'S PROCLAMATION AND DEMARCHE ALONG LINES REFTTEL THIS MORNING (AUGUST 1) TO AMBASSADOR JOSE LUIS PEREZ, MINREX DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AFFAIRS. I ALSO LEFT A NON-PAPER BASED ON TALKING POINTS WITH HIM. PEREZ SAID THAT GOC RECOGNIZED PRESIDENT CARTER'S PROCLAMATION AS IMPORTANT ACCEPTANCE OF NEED FOR SELF-DETERMINATION FOR PUERTO RICO, AND ALSO RECOGNIZED IMPORTANCE OF PUERTO RICAN ISSUE TO USG. HE SAID THAT GOC WILL CONSIDER PROCLAMATION AND ELEMENTS OF MY PRESENTATION CAREFULLY. WHILE GIVING NO RPT NO ASSURANCES ON CUBAN POSTURE IN COMMITTEE OF 24, HE DID SAY THAT CUBA HAS NO PRESENT INTENTION OF TAKING UNILATERAL LEAD ON THE MATTER THIS YEAR.

2. PEREZ SAID THAT HE CONSIDERED IT INEVITABLE THAT THE PUERTO RICAN QUESTION SHOULD AT LEAST APPEAR ON THE AGENDA OF C-24 SINCE IT WAS PREVIOUSLY POSTPONED FOR ONLY ONE YEAR. HE VOLUNTEERED THAT THIS WOULD NOT NECESSARILY
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PREVENT A DECISION SIMPLY TO POSTPONE IT AGAIN, ALTHOUGH OTHER OUTCOMES WERE ALSO POSSIBLE, AND COMMENTED THAT IN ANY CASE DISCUSSION NEED NOT BE ACRIMONIOUS IN VIEW OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S INITIATIVE. HE SAID THAT CUBA'S POSTURE ON THE SUBJECT WOULD BE AFFECTED BY SEVERAL CONSIDERATIONS, INCLUDING: A) STUDY OF PRESIDENT'S PROCLAMATION AND PLANS FOR PUERTO RICAN PLEBESCITE AFTER 1980; B) THE DEBATE AND RESOLUTION ON PUERTO RICA ISSUE AT

JUST-CONCLUDED BELGRADE NAM CONFERENCE (HE SAID HE DID NOT YET HAVE FULL TEXT OF THAT RESOLUTION AND VARIOUS COUNTRIES' RESERVATIONS THERETO); AND C) INITIATIVES THAT MIGHT BE TAKEN IN C-24 BY OTHER STATES OR ENTITIES. HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT CUBA WOULD NOT TAKE A BACK SEAT IF OTHERS PUSH THE MATTER; E.G. CUBA WOULD OF COURSE OFFER PUBLIC SUPPORT SHOULD PUERTO RICAN NATIONALISTS COME BEFORE THE COMMITTEE AGAIN THIS YEAR. HE ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT CUBAN WOULD "DEFEND ITSELF" SHOULD IT BE ATTACKED IN THE DEBATE. (WHILE HE WOULD NOT EXPAND ON THIS, I SUSPECT HE WAS ALLUDING TO REPEATED ALLEGATIONS OF CUBAN SUPPORT FOR PUERTO RICAN TERRORIST GROUPS.)

3. I PRESSED FOR SOME ELABORATION OR CLARIFICATION OF PRESIDENT CASTRO'S REPORTED ASSURANCE TO VISITING U.S. MAYORS THAT CUBA WOULD ACCEPT ANY STATUS FREELY CHOSEN BY PUERTO RICANS THEMSELVES. I ALLUDED SPECIFICALLY TO CASTRO'S MOST RECENT AND APPARENTLY CONTRADICTORY VIEWS ON THIS SUBJECT AS EXPRESSED TO CUBAN AND OTHER LATIN AMERICAN DELEGATES TO THE XI WORLD YOUTH FESTIVAL. ACCORDING TO CUBAN PRESS ON JULY 31, CASTRO STATED THAT CUBA WILL NOT RENOUNCE ITS DEFENSE OF THE PUERTO RICAN CAUSE AND THAT "LATIN AMERICA CANNOT PERMIT A SISTER PEOPLE TO BE SWALLOWED BY IMPERIALISM". THE PRESS REPORT WENT ON TO PARAPHRASE CASTRO AS SAYING THAT "PROGRESSIVE AND DEMOCRATIC FORCES HAVE THE DUTY TO MAKE THE CAUSE OF PUERTO RICAN INDEPENDENCE THEIR OWN AND TO FIGHT TO AVOID ITS

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ANNEXATION BY THE U.S." PEREZ PURPORTED NOT TO BE FAMILIAR WITH CASTRO'S FORMULATION TO THE MAYORS, AND HE WOULD NOT PROMISE TO GET ME AN AUTHORITATIVE INTERPRETATION. SEVERAL TIMES DURING OUR CONVERSATION, HOWEVER, PEREZ REITERATED THE FOLLOWING POINTS ON CUBAN POLICY TOWARD PUERTO RICO WHICH HE HAS EXPRESSED TO USINT IN THE PAST: A) CUBA WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT PUBLICLY AND MORALLY ANY EXPRESSION OF PUERTO RICAN DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE (HE EMPHASIZED THAT THIS DID NOT MEAN SUBVERSION); AND B) THAT THE FINAL DECISION ON THEIR OWN POLITICAL FUTURE IS FOR THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE ALONE TO MAKE.

4. I, OF COURSE, SEIZED ON THE LAST POINT TO REEMPHASIZE THAT WE ARE IN ACCORD ON THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE, AND THAT THE USG HOPED THAT CUBA WOULD TAKE THIS INTO ACCOUNT AT THE C-24 THIS YEAR TO AVOID A COUNTERPRODUCTIVE DEBATE AND TO IMPROVE THE ATMOSPHERE FOR OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS.

5. SEVERAL TIMES DURING OUR CONVERSATION, PEREZ MADE SUBTLE REFERENCES TO THE MODALITIES OF THE REFERENDUM PROCESS, SUGGESTING FUTURE AREAS OF CONTENTION WITH CUBA WHICH MAY COME INCREASINGLY TO THE FORE. FOR EXAMPLE, HE ALLUDED TO

THE POOR TURNOUT IN PREVIOUS PUERTO RICAN ELECTIONS WHICH
TENDED TO DISCREDIT THEIR VALIDITY AS EXPRESSIONS OF POPULAR
INTENT. HE ALSO ALLUDED TO THE CONTINUING PRESENCE OF U.S.
MILITARY FORCE IN PUERTO RICO, SUGGESTING THAT A FREE
EXPRESSION OF PUERTO RICAN POPULAR WILL IS DIFFICULT IF
NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO OBTAIN. FINALLY, HE OBSERVED VERY MUCH
IN PASSING THAT ONE POSSIBLE "MODALITY" FOR THE REFERENDUM
MIGHT BE TO GRANT PUERTO RICO COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE IN ADVANCE
SO THAT THE PEOPLE COULD VOTE ON A BASIS OF ABSOLUTE FREE
CHOICE. I, OF COURSE, MADE THE POINT STRONGLY THAT THE USG
WOULD BE COMMITTED TO AN ABSOLUTELY FREE AND HONEST REFERENDUM
IN PUERTO RICO.

6. COMMENT: I URGED UPON PEREZ THE DESIRABILITY OF OUR
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KEEPING IN CLOSE TOUCH ON THE PUERTO RICAN QUESTION AS THE DATE
FOR THE C-24 MEETING APPROACHES. I SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED
FURTHER REACTIONS TO MY DEMARCHE, BUT I HAVE MY DOUBTS WHETHER
WE WILL HEAR MORE FROM THAT QUARTER. WHILE SEVERAL OF
PEREZ' COMMENTS WERE MODERATELY ENCOURAGING, OTHERS ARE
DISTURBING AND I THINK WE SHOULD HAVE NO ILLUSIONS THAT
CUBA WILL NOT PRESS FOR DEBATE ON PUERTO RICO THIS YEAR.
THIS SEEMS ESPECIALLY LIKELY IN VIEW OF STRONG RESOLUTION
APPROVED IN BELGRADE WHICH I HAVE JUST SEEN. AS SUGGESTED
IN HAVANA 2003, AND DEPENDING UPON THE GENERAL STATE OF
U.S.-CUBAN RELATIONS AS WELL AS THE EVOLVING SITUATION IN
THE C-24, I BELIEVE THAT A PERSONAL COMMUNICATION TO THE
CUBANS FROM SECRETARY VANCE OR AMBASSADOR YOUNG MIGHT BE
FRUITFUL AND MAY BE NECESSARY IF WE HOPE TO MOVE
THE CUBANS AT A CRITICAL STAGE OF THE DELIBERATIONS. IN
THIS CONNECTION, I AGAIN URGE THAT THE USG BEGIN CONTINGENCY
PLANNING FOR A COMPROMISE C-24 RESOLUTION ON PUERTO RICO
SHOULD OUR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE A SIMPLE POSTPONEMENT OF
THE ISSUE PROVE UNSUCCESSFUL.
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